

# The Red Envelope

## Revelations of An Ambassador-at-Large

Transcribed by H. M. Egbert from the private papers of an Englishman who for a time was an unofficial diplomat in the most secret service of the British Government.

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I happened to be in Tokyo at the time of what is called, in inner diplomatic circles, the Household Plot. How nearly it succeeded in embroiling the United States and Japan only five men know in detail. The first of these is Sir Arthur Sturt, the British ambassador to the mikado's court. The second is the Chinese minister. The third is myself. The fourth is Count Okuma, the astute one-legged statesman, who has been a moving power in Japanese affairs since the reform era began—or was, until the events that I shall describe occurred. The fifth is Doctor Fong, and where he is nobody knows.

I was not in Japan in any official capacity. I was there renewing my acquaintance with old scenes and persons, when Sir Arthur, from whom I had parted the night before, on the occasion of Lady Sturt's reception, and as I thought, probably forever—since I was planning to sail for Shanghai—sent for me by a special embassy messenger.

I knew that some matter of the gravest import must have happened to cause him to summon me at eight o'clock in the morning. The cause was partly revealed, however, when, on bringing me my breakfast, my Chinese boy informed me that his majesty, Mutsuhito, emperor of Japan, was dying.

I had known of the precarious condition of his health, and that the fatal climax of his wasting disease might occur at almost any time; still, the shock seemed to have been very sudden, for when I said good-by to Sir Arthur, the evening before, his majesty was reported to be in excellent health.

I had a ricksha called and hastily made my way into the embassy compound, where the ambassador's secretary was awaiting me with a very grave expression upon his face.

"You have heard the news?" he asked. "His majesty—"

"Is dead!" I exclaimed.

"He has been dead two days," he answered.

This news was confirmed by Sir Arthur, who looked even graver as he motioned me to a chair.

"I have been told, Mr. X—," he began, "that you have a more intimate acquaintance with the court life of Japan than any man since Bertram Milford."

"Your excellency is very kind," I began, but Sir Arthur cut me short.

"This is no time for compliments," he interrupted brusquely. "I have just been informed that the emperor's death has been kept secret these two days for the gravest reasons. You are, I believe, personally acquainted with Count Okuma?"

"As everybody is," I answered. For Count Okuma, stumping around on his wooden leg—the other was destroyed years ago by a fanatic's bomb; Okuma, the friend of foreigners, the man whose affection of the simple life led him to carry home his own laundry; Okuma, the patron of western learning, the wildest and most astute of the complex-minded advisers of the late emperor, was the most accessible and friendly of men.

"I am informed, beyond the possibility of doubt," said the ambassador, "that Okuma has now in his pocket an ultimatum to be presented to the American minister this afternoon, at the palace."

I saw at once the meaning of the conspiracy of silence. Mutsuhito, of course, would never have sanctioned war with the United States; and Yoshitomo, his heir, and now in theory, though not in fact, emperor of Japan, was even more firmly pro-American. The interregnum, thus artificially created, was to be utilized by Count Okuma and the cabal which he had formed for the purpose of an attack upon the Philippines.

"The name of his late majesty was forged to this document, which is written on the regulation thick red state note paper," continued Sir Arthur. "Japan demands that the United States evacuate the Philippines within a week. And you see how this affects Great Britain."

I certainly did. As a treaty ally of Japan, England would be compelled to stand aside, if she did not participate in the attack, impotent to aid America. Her action would doubtless be construed as an alliance with Japan, or at least a participation in her treachery, and the people of the United States, stung to the quick, would certainly declare war upon England, with results incalculably evil to humanity.

And, with all respect to the valor of American arms, to hold the Philippines against Japan would be, as all strategists are aware, a military impossibility. Manila must fall long before reinforcements arrived; and, without a base, without adequate transportation facilities, how could the United States hope to throw an army of half a million men into the archipelago, to cope successfully with the war-trained veterans of Japan?

Nay, assuming a base on a nearby island, how could that country trans-

port more than fifty thousand troops at a single voyage, and how could these fifty thousand hold out while the transports went back for more? It is the old story of the fox, the goose and the bag of oats.

On this account I have always strongly urged the abandonment of the Philippines, which will one day prove a bitter disillusionment to the United States.

Now I realized the ramifications of the conspiracy. It was for this purpose that the war syndicate, which was seeking to embroil England and America on behalf of Germany, had taken up the latest Japanese loan at four per cent, instead of the five which the imperial government had had to pay for its last issue. The scheme was as clear as daylight.

"You understand the situation, no doubt," said Sir Arthur, who had been watching my face closely.

"Entirely, your excellency," I answered. "It is necessary for us to obtain that document before the count can present it."

"Yes, which means before sundown, when, since Mutsuhito's death can be concealed no longer, Yoshitomo will be notified of his accession to the throne. The document will undoubtedly be presented to the American minister at the palace, the count occupying the suite of the minister in waiting there."

It may be strange that the heir to the throne could have been kept two days in ignorance of his father's death—strange to one ignorant of Japanese court ceremony; but not to one aware that the emperor, as a divine being, may not be touched, or even seen, by the members of his own family, except at his demand.

I could picture the dead monarch behind the drawn screens in the death chamber; the doctor, fearfully performing the last medical rites; and the imperial family, waiting in ante-chambers for their god's permission to bid him farewell before his translation to the celestial spheres.

"My information," continued Sir Arthur, "comes from the Chinese minister, who vouches for its accuracy. As you know, he is a warm friend of America, and he has methods of his own for making such discoveries. The Chinese spy system is greatly in advance of the Japanese. Yet I am a little uneasy for fear of some subtle trick having been laid for me, and I am anxious to obtain your advice, on account of your acquaintance with the inner affairs of Japanese court life."

His excellency's reference to my attaché days, when it was said, I believe, that I was the only European acquainted with the ramifications of political intrigue in what was still called the Hermit kingdom, touched me. Sir Arthur had a good memory, when he chose to give it play. Still, those were the early days of Meiji, as the new era is called, and things are different now.

"In brief," continued the ambassador, "the Chinese minister asks me to place myself in the hands of Doctor Fong, the third court physician. Did you ever hear of him?"

Hear of Fong? A shadowy figure suddenly leaped into my mind, perfectly outlined. I remembered Doctor Fong perfectly.

An accomplished Chinese scholar, he had been employed years before in the medical department of the Japanese legation in Peking. What his duties had been is immaterial; but he was connected—falsely, I believe, with the mysterious death of the predecessor of the late empress dowager, Tai-An, the first wife of the penultimate emperor of the extinct dynasty.

Fong had been put on trial for murder, had been acquitted and had later become head of the department of tropical medicine at the University of Osaka. The government subsequently removed him from his post, and he had lived a lonely and embittered life, blaming the cause of his downfall upon Count Okuma. The knowledge of this made me believe that Fong would prove of genuine service to us.

I knew that the late emperor's mysterious disease had been a form of beriberi, a malignant, chronic kind peculiar to the island of Hondo, and I surmised that Doctor Fong's knowledge of tropical diseases had brought him back to favor as one of the imperial attendants. I communicated all these facts to Sir Arthur.

"Then will you accompany me to the palace at once?" he asked me. "Each of the ambassadors has a suite set apart for him there; and we can interview our man unmolested."

I assented at once, and a few minutes later, we were bowing through the streets in one of the embassy rickshas. A run of thirty minutes brought us to the palace grounds, and shortly afterward we were in the ambassador's quarters, consisting of two or three spacious rooms on the second floor.

Although there was no outward sign of lamentation, something in the atmosphere of the interior showed that the news of Mutsuhito's death had already become common property. There was gloom upon the faces of

the palace attendants, shuffling to and fro along the corridors in their felt slippers. At the far end of the long passage, at the back entrance to the state apartments, we saw an anxious throng assembled, and, as we were about to enter the ambassador's rooms, we saw the crowd suddenly prostrate itself as a tiny lady, attired in a European court dress, with low neck and sweeping train upheld by four pages, passed by.

"Her highness, the royal concubine, Otura," explained the ambassador. "Let's get inside before we meet her. Sometimes one requires tact in meeting certain court situations, don't you know?"

Inside the rooms a tall man, with a clean-shaven, anxious face, was seated beside the fire, reading the Daily Herald. As we entered, he sprang to his feet, and I recognized the American minister.

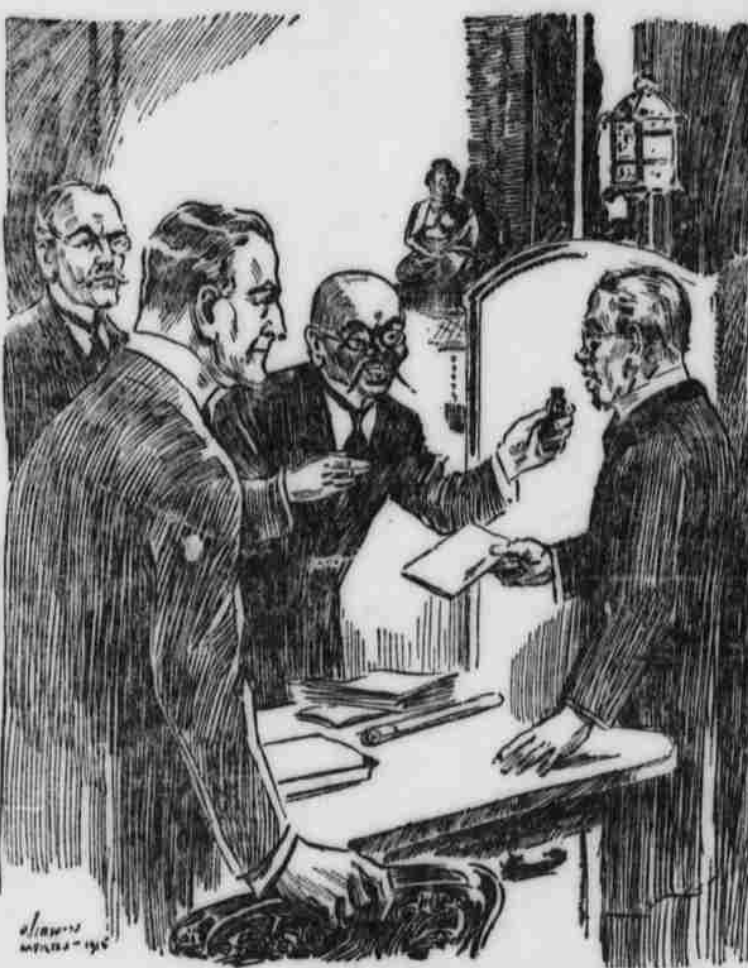
"How do you do, Sir Arthur?" he cried heartily. "Have you heard the news? His majesty is dying. I got the tip from my Chinese boy, and hurried round to be in attendance."

"Yes, it is very sad," said Sir Arthur solemnly.

"His case is considered hopeless, I believe," continued the American minister. "At least I met Count Okuma on my way, and he looked very despondent. What a charming, enlightened man the count is! He was so friendly, in spite of his preoccupation, that I was almost tempted to suggest calling in Doctor Phineas, of our legation, who took his degree at Johns Hopkins. However—would you have suggested it?"

"It is always a little dubious, making suggestions," said Sir Arthur thoughtfully.

"But Count Okuma is so transparently simple—just like one of us," said the American minister. "I really wanted—however, I've no doubt these



Fong Walked Straight to the Count. "Her Imperial Highness," He Began, Holding the Vial Beneath His Nose.

Japanese doctors are competent to handle the situation. I won't keep you, Sir Arthur, but if I hear of any developments in the situation, I shall let you know at once."

"I am infinitely obliged to you, my dear colleague," replied Sir Arthur, shaking him warmly by the hand.

"Do you know," he said to me, when the minister had gone, "that sort of man makes the best possible ambassador? Directness, guilelessness are awfully puzzling for the sophisticated Japanese mind. However—here is our friend."

Doctor Fong was just entering the doorway, and, though it was years since I had seen him, I knew him immediately. The yellow, wrinkled skin looked as much like parchment, the wiry, thin mustache still drooped blackly on either side of the sensitive mouth, and the eyes, behind their heavy convex lenses, were shrewd, kindly, and yet impetuous.

Doctor Fong murmured my name as he shook hands with me.

"I see you have a long memory for faces, doctor," said Sir Arthur.

"I never forget anything," replied Fong quietly.

"Mr. X—is to be trusted implicitly," said Sir Arthur. "He understands the entire situation, and thoroughly indorses your ability."

"I am delighted," murmured Fong, in his monotonous, soft tone. "And now, we will begin by trusting one another completely in this affair. It is your excellency's desire to obtain a certain document now in the possession of a distinguished diplomatist?"

"If it can be done honestly," said Sir Arthur. "I mean," he added, "I cannot countenance any objectionable methods. Confound it, Doctor Fong, we have got to get possession of that document before sundown," he added.

"Where is it?"

"Upon the person of the distinguished diplomatist," answered the doctor.

"How can you get it?"

"Will you permit me to show your excellency in pantomime?" inquired Fong.

"Certainly," said Sir Arthur, growing evidently interested as he saw the doctor take a small phial from his

pocket, half full of a clear, slightly opalescent liquid. "You are not planning to chloroform the count, I hope?" he continued. "I cannot countenance—"

"Chloroform? The invention of a barbarian?" murmured Doctor Fong contemptuously. "We discarded chloroform in B. C. 1774. There is no need to use chloroform, nor the opportunity. Besides, it always requires methodical application, and cannot be used upon a man against his will. No." He picked up a piece of note paper that lay upon the table. "This represents the document, your excellency, and you are now delivering it to me. Hold it firmly in your right hand, so. Now have the goodness to look carefully at this vial. Observe the twinkling lights—"

I thought at first that Doctor Fong was trying to hypnotize the ambassador, for he held the vial closely under his face. Then I saw that Sir Arthur was standing as rigid as a statue, his eyes fixed firmly upon the vial; but there was not the smallest expression upon his face, and he was as rigid as a cataleptic. I knew that catalepsy cannot be induced immediately by hypnotism. I could not detect the slightest odor from the vial.

Doctor Fong opened the ambassador's fingers and took the paper. Turning toward the table, he took up a pen and wrote something upon it. Then he replaced it between Sir Arthur's fingers, recocked the vial, and placed it in his pocket. Half a minute later I saw Sir Arthur's muscles lose their rigidity and the natural expression come back to his face.

"But you have taken it away," he said.

"The vial?" inquired the doctor blandly.

"You asked me to look at it," said Sir Arthur.

"No, no, your excellency. I should

have said, look at the paper," replied Doctor Fong.

Sir Arthur turned the paper up. Upon the other side was written:

"This is to certify that I have complete confidence in Doctor Fong."

"You are not conscious of the lapse of any interval of time since I began this experiment, your excellency?" Fong inquired.

"You have been asleep for a couple of minutes," I explained, as Sir Arthur looked from the paper to us in bewilderment. And it took a couple of minutes more before we could get him to understand. Then Fong explained.

"Extract of venatica," he explained, taking out the vial and tapping it with his lean forefinger. "The Formosan head-hunters are acquainted with its peculiar properties. In China we use something better. However, this enables them to get heads. The drug not only produces immediate unconsciousness, when inhaled—you were inhaling it when you thought you were looking at it—but there is no remembrance, after awakening, of anything that has happened since the first inhalation."

All the innate pharisaism of the Englishman came to the surface as Sir Arthur answered:

"I can't countenance that method, doctor," he said, a little pompously, and, I thought, a little humiliated.

"But if you think you can get the document in—"

"I understand, your excellency," replied Doctor Fong blandly. "The document is the first consideration, after which we can proceed to analyze the means we have employed. By the way, his majesty's end is expected at any moment now, and I must return to my post of duty. You can trust me, your excellency," he added, as he bowed himself through the door.

At five o'clock we were still in Sir Arthur's quarters. The American minister had returned twice, to inform us that Mutsuhito was at death's door. The French minister had looked in to tell Sir Arthur that, according to a palace rumor, the emperor had died early in the afternoon. At the end of the corridor the crowd of courtiers

was constantly prostrating itself as one or other of the royal ladies and imperial princes passed into the mikado's anteroom.

It was a few minutes after five when a distant murmur, like the droning of bees, made itself audible. It rose and swelled into a mourning din.

The emperor was officially dead. The sound of lamentations filled the palace. From our window we could see that a vast throng had assembled in the grounds, and, rippling from one to another, the sound was taken up until it seemed as though the entire people wailed in unison.

"Count Okuma is ready to strike. Heaven grant that Fong does not fail us," said Sir Arthur, turning to me. Then, doubtfully: "Can you assure me on your honor that I was rendered unconscious?"

Before I could assure him, a tap sounded on the door, and a page appeared. He announced that Count Okuma requested the honor of Sir Arthur's presence in his apartment.

We went down the corridor in the page's wake, until we came to the little room that Okuma occupied. It was filled with the ambassadors and ministers of the various powers.

It was furnished with a Spartan simplicity, which Okuma, who was a good deal of a demagogue, affected, hoping thereby to set an example of frugality to the rising generation, and ignorant, like all demagogues, that the people saw through his pose. There was a low Japanese couch, concealed in part by a low screen, a bronze Buddha upon a pedestal, a charcoal box, a hibachi, a writing table, a desk heaped high with papers, and a number of chairs.

I perceived that the American minister alone was absent.

Count Okuma was seated at his desk, facing us, his wooden leg thrust out before him, and an expression of remarkable guilelessness on his smooth-shaven face.

"Gentlemen," said the count, rising. "I have the deep sorrow of announcing to you the demise of his imperial majesty five minutes ago."

Immediately each of the representatives, Sir Arthur included, produced a written memorandum of condolence, which he handed to the count with a bow and a few conventional words. It was an interesting comedy, not the least amusing part being Okuma's expression of surprise and pleasure at these tokens of international sympathy with Japan.

As we were about to leave, among the others, Count Okuma called to Sir Arthur and asked him to remain behind.

"One moment, Sir Arthur," he said, with a charming smile. "It is to be my pleasure to address a communication to your colleague from Washington, who will be here in a moment, and, as our ally, it would be felicitous for you to be present."

He looked keenly into Sir Arthur's face as he spoke, and I saw that the British ambassador's expression was almost as guileless as the count's.

We waited. Presently we heard footsteps at the farther end of the passage. The American minister was on his way to the count's room.

Okuma, turning from us, began to rummage among the heap of papers upon the desk before him, which appeared to consist largely of bills and household receipts, until he came upon a red envelope, of legal size, unfastened, and evidently containing the ultimatum.

He took it in his hand and stood, propping himself upon his wooden leg, his whole expression that of a charming man of the world. If the momentary minute affected him, there was no sign of it in his aspect. And the footsteps were drawing nearer.

Suddenly the face of Doctor Fong appeared at the door. He bowed low before the count; for the first time, I saw the count's expression change.

Did he suspect Fong at that moment and remember the man's grievance against him? It was one of those dramatic moments when nothing is said, nothing done, and yet one seems to feel the thoughts of others.

Fong walked straight to the count. "Her imperial highness—" he began, and held the vial beneath his nose.

The expression that had been on Count Okuma's face was still there, but it seemed to have been frozen there; and he remained in exactly the same position as he had occupied, slightly leaning upon his wooden leg, the envelope between his fingers.

"Good Lord! Was I like that?" I heard Sir Arthur whisper, as Fong gently opened the count's fingers and took the envelope.

I heard the slight click as the thumb and fingers came together again.

Hastily Fong slipped the inclosure out of the envelope. From the desk he grabbed up a bill or letter, which he placed inside. I did not see what he did with the document, but when he turned back, his hands were empty.

"Could your excellency find some pretext to hold the American minister at the door for a minute?" Fong asked.

Sir Arthur stepped hastily into the doorway, where the minister was just arriving. I saw Fong slip the vial back into the pocket and replace the red envelope between the frozen count's fingers. And then, as the doctor stepped back, I saw the count's consciousness return as instantly as a ripple goes across wheat. Every muscle resumed its functions at the same moment.

"I am greatly indisposed as a consequence of his majesty's translation," continued Fong.

"I greatly regret to hear it," answered the count. "I shall prostrate myself before her later in the afternoon. You are attending her carefully?"

"With the utmost care," answered

the Chinaman, retiring obsequiously backward.

And it was evident that Count Okuma had not the slightest suspicion of what had happened. Sir Arthur had stepped hastily back to his side, and the American minister was in the room.

"I have the great sorrow of announcing to you, sir, the demise of his imperial majesty, ten minutes ago," said Count Okuma to the minister.

With a few murmured words of sorrow, the minister quickly produced a written memorandum of condolence, which the count placed among the others on his desk.

"Your excellency," he continued, "there is a communication of some importance which I have to make to you on behalf of the imperial Japanese government. I do so, for reasons which this communication makes apparent in the presence of his excellency, the British ambassador."

And he handed the minister the red envelope.

The American minister took the envelope and, bowing, withdrew. He hesitated at the door, and seemed desirous of addressing Sir Arthur, but one latter hurried past him to his apartment and we left together a few minutes later, as the thunder of guns announced the accession of Yoshihito, the new emperor of Japan.

How nearly a great war between Japan and America, and another between the two English-speaking nations, was frustrated, becomes clear from the following letter, which I received from Sir Arthur in Shanghai:

"The American minister called on me at ten o'clock the morning of the day you left.

"I never heard that the Japanese were an absent-minded people, Sir Arthur," he said, laughing, 'but this is too good to hold. Permit me to show you what Count Okuma handed to me last night. I telephoned to ask if a mistake had been made, but the count had been taken ill and was in bed, his secretary told me."

"And he pulled the red envelope out of his pocket and handed me—Count Okuma's laundry list! Three pairs of silk pajamas, a dozen linen handkerchiefs, and numerous other items prove that the count's Spartan simplicity is more apparent than real. No wonder that Okuma was taken ill after the discovery."

"I owe you a thousand thanks for your assistance. Doctor Fong's revenge had all the Chinese subtlety, did it not? But I often wonder whether the laundryman received a communication instructing him to abandon his premises under threat of naval intervention."

## FOR PROLONGATION OF YOUTH

At 35 Unmarried Woman Still Has Hope—At 50 or 60 Man Cannot Be Called Aged.

If there be any one thing that distinguishes our age from the ages which have preceded it, it is the prolongation of youth, remarks the Rochester Post-Express. Formerly a girl who did not marry before her twenty-sixth summer was looked upon as passe. At thirty-five, if she remained unwedded, she was described as a confirmed old maid. Now she may be young at twenty-six, and no sane person considers her unmarriageable at thirty-five.

A man is no longer old at fifty, or even at sixty. As Dr. C. W. Saleeby, a London physician who knows something about psychology, admirably puts it: "If your arteries are soft, if you still believe in life and love and friendship and the future, it does not matter a straw how old your body may be; you are still young, for your soul is young, and youth is a state of the soul." He adds that the revolution which is taking place in our ideas of youth and age means the union of two precious things, enthusiasm and experience, which to our ancestors appeared incompatible.

One result of the change must be that we shall have fewer youthful prodigies. William Pitt was prime minister of England at twenty-four, but in the future politicians in the early twenties will be only "boy orators." The statesmen of forty will be only in the stage of apprenticeship for the work of government. Youth will have to wait longer because it will last longer. Withal, age will be genial, not harsh, and the young may learn from those who, though growing old, still retain the spirit of youth, how to enjoy the passing years wisely.

## Precious Stones.

It is not definitely known how the names of certain months became associated with the names of certain stones. It is thought, however, that there is a relation, real or supposed, between the character of the month and the stone which has come to represent it. April, for instance, marks the beginning of spring weather, when the sun shines brilliantly in contrast with the winter sun, and the diamond appropriately represents this month. In May green foliage appears, and the emerald is therefore a fitting gem. There are many different lists of months and the birthstones assigned to them, but the one which follows is commonly accepted. It was adopted by the American National Retail Jewelers' in convention, August 8, 1913: January, garnet; February, amethyst; March, bloodstone and aquamarine; April, diamond; May, emerald; June, pearl and moonstone; July, ruby; August, sardonyx and peridot; September, sapphire; October, opal and tourmaline; November, topaz; December, turquoise and lapis-lazuli.